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AGREEMENT IS NEW WAY OF DOING BUSINESS AT LANGLEY

NASA, shipyard partner to improve marine vessels

NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., will partner with Newport News Shipbuilding under a potentially wide-ranging agreement designed to enhance the performance of marine vessels.

The agreement also represents a new way of doing business at NASA Langley that will make it much easier and faster for companies to partner with the research center.

The "memorandum of agreement" begins with a $50,000 joint effort to "investigate the performance of flow control technology for marine application." Flow control technology manipulates the way water flows around a ship or submarine hull to make the craft more efficient, faster and quieter.

"Rapid access to NASA's research facilities and personnel will allow Newport News Shipbuilding to expedite the transition of new flow control technologies out of the laboratory and onto the ship," said Michael L. Powell, director, Technology Development for Newport News Shipbuilding. "Although the initial focus is on flow control, our perception of this agreement is that it opens the door to a wide spectrum of potential ship improvements. This partnership will marry the world-class research capabilities of NASA with the strong engineering and production capability at NNS.

"The beneficiary of this MOA truly is the U.S. Navy," added Powell, "who will reap the rewards of the technologies we pursue under this agreement. This is just another example of our commitment to providing the U.S. Navy with the world's most capable warships."

Under the agreement, NASA Langley will use its 20 x 28-Inch Low-Speed Tunnel to analyze the downstream flow characteristics of flow control devices. NASA Langley also will help the shipyard optimize the flow control technology for marine application, with a final report due by Dec. 15, 2000.

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"This is research that, in its practical application, will help assure the continued superiority of our national defense," said Samuel A. Morello, director of the Technology Commercialization Program Office at NASA Langley. "Naturally, we're delighted to be able to make this contribution to the safety and security of the United States."

The flow control agreement, Morello said, is the first what of he hopes will be many "annexes," or additions, to the overall partnership with the shipyard. The agreement, he said, is designed so that further joint efforts with NASA Langley can be put into effect quickly.

Morello said the structure of the agreement will also be used as a model for working with other businesses. "We want to improve the way we partner with industry," he said, "and this is a tool that will let us respond very fast and effectively to those seeking our expertise or help."

"The beauty of it is that we use a general, overall agreement as the basis for a partnership, then add specific annexes as desired. That way you don't have to redraw the entire agreement every time you want to do something new," Morello said. "We're zapping the bureaucracy."

Morello said the aerodynamic research conducted at NASA Langley to improve aircraft can be applied to the marine environment as well, because the principles are basically the same. "So this makes our work with the shipyard a very natural thing to do," he said. "Also, the work that we do with the shipyard is likely to have applications to aircraft, so it's a double benefit."

About 70 percent of NASA Langley's work is in aeronautics research. The Center, the nation's first civilian aeronautics lab when it was founded in 1917, has helped improve the performance of virtually every military and commercial aircraft produced in the United States.

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